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METHODS OF SCHOOL BOARD SELECTION.
NATIONAL SCHOOL BOARDS ASSN., EVANSTON, ILL.

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SELECTION OF SCHOOL BOARD MEMBERS IS GOVERNED IN ALL STATES BY LAW. SURVEYS SHOW THAT 33 STATES ELECTED ALL BOARD MEMBERS BY POPULAR VOTE. IN NINE STATES, MOST BOARD MEMBERS WERE ELECTED. HOWEVER, IN LARGE CITIES BOARDS WERE MORE OFTEN APPOINTIVE. EIGHTY-FIVE PERCENT OF THE BOARDS IN THE U.S. WERE ELECTED, 70 PERCENT IN NONPARTISAN ELECTIONS. OVER 90 PERCENT OF THE ELECTED BOARDS WERE LOCATED IN THE NORTHEASTERN, NORTH CENTRAL, AND WESTERN STATES. MOST APPOINTIVE BOARDS WERE CONCENTRATED IN THE LARGE CITIES OF GEORGIA, MARYLAND, NORTH CAROLINA, TENNESSEE, AND VIRGINIA. NATIONALLY, ABOUT 14 PERCENT OF THE BOARDS WERE APPOINTED. OF THESE, 27 PERCENT WERE LOCATED IN CITIES OVER 300,000. ADMINISTRATORS DIFFER AS TO THE BEST METHOD OF BOARD SELECTION, AND RESEARCH HAS NOT SUPPORTED ANOTHER METHOD. THE ELECTIVE METHOD INSURES CONTINUED PUBLIC INTEREST AND INVOLVEMENT, GREATER INTIMACY WITH THE PUBLIC, AND HARMONIOUS RELATIONS BETWEEN BOARDS AND PROFESSIONAL STAFF. THE APPOINTIVE METHOD INSURES GREATER SELECTIVITY OF BOARD MEMBERS, MORE HARMONIOUS RELATIONS BETWEEN BOARDS AND GOVERNING BODIES, AND GREATER STABILITY AND CONTINUITY OF MEMBERSHIP. ELECTIVE MEMBERSHIP TENDS TO BECOME PARTISAN, WHEREAS APPOINTIVE MEMBERSHIP TENDS TO BECOME DICTATORIAL. SUCH LIMITATIONS CAN BE OVERCOME BEST BY A CAUCUS COMPOSED OF ALL CONCERNED PERSONS. THIS DOCUMENT APPEARS IN "THE NATIONAL SCHOOL BOARDS ASSOCIATION INFORMATION SERVICE BULLETIN," VOLUME 5, NUMBER 5, JULY 1967, AND IS AVAILABLE FOR $0.10 FROM NSBA, 1233 CENTRAL STREET, EVANSTON, ILLINOIS 60201. (JN)

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METHODS OF SCHOOL BOARD SELECTION

The quality of local public schools rests in the legal responsibility of school board members for development of educational policy. Continued success of America's program of public education is dependent upon the selection of able men and women, voluntarily serving as board members, who will determine the broad policies under which the schools operate.

Because school boards represent the community in establishing the school district's educational program, the selection of school board members is of major significance. And as public education increases in size and complexity and as its problems become more urgent, the quality of people serving on school boards becomes of increasing concern to the citizenry.

Methods of selecting the best qualified school board members are prescribed by state law. The two basic methods are appointment and election, with election by the people being the most common procedure. Thirty-three states elect all their school board members by popular vote. In nine states most school board members are elected by popular vote, the exceptions usually being the larger cities in which the board members are either appointed or nominated by another governmental agency. Including these exceptions, there are appointive boards in fifteen states.

Election

Important variations in the elective method include the use of partisan or nonpartisan ballots, whether the election is held in conjunction with a general election or held separately, whether the selection of members is from the district at large or from subareas of the district, and whether all voters of the district are entitled to participate in the election of all board members or whether the voters of each subdivision of the district vote only for a resident of their subdivision.

Statistically, approximately 85 percent of school boards are elected by popular vote. In a 1962 study of 4,045 school systems in the United States, Alpheus White found that 85.9 percent had elected boards. The proportion of elected boards varied inversely with school district size: the smallest school districts — those with enrollments from 1,200 to 5,999 — had 86.7 percent elected boards. White also revealed that over 90 percent of the elected school boards were located in the Northeast, North Central and West regions of the country.[1]

A later, less extensive study conducted by the National Education Association substantiated White's basic findings. Of 385 school systems with 12,000 or more enrollment, more than three-quarters had elected boards. Of these, 82.3 percent were elected on a nonpartisan basis and 16.4 percent on a partisan ballot.[2]

Very little research has been reported regarding when school board elections are conducted. Edward M. Tuttle estimates that about 40 percent of these elections are held at the same time as are regular political elections, and in perhaps half of these cases the names of school board candidates are included on the regular ballots, following nomination by the party machines. About 60 percent of school board elections are held at a different time than political elections with the intent of focusing attention on them from a nonpartisan standpoint.[3]

Appointment

The concentration of appointive school boards is found in large city school districts and in six Southern states where the appointive method is prescribed by state law — Georgia, Maryland, North Carolina, South Carolina, Tennessee and Virginia. According to White, approximately 14 percent of the nation's school boards are appointed, with 26.6 percent of those representing school district enrollments of 25,000 or more. Thirty-eight percent of the school boards in the South are appointed.[4]

The previously-cited NEA study revealed that 20 percent of the reporting school systems had appointed boards. The largest proportion were in school districts where enrollments were 100,000 or more.[5]

More recently, a National School Boards Association survey of boards of education in cities of 300,000 population and over showed that 11 of the 42 (26%) large cities select board members by the appointment method. Responsibility for making the appointments falls to a variety of governmental bodies or officials, most frequently the mayor or city council. Other appointing civil officials include the city commissioner, county supervisors, county board of education, governor, state legislature and local court judges.

Pros and Cons

Among school administration authorities there is some difference of opinion as to whether board members might best be elected or appointed and whether the selection procedure should be on a nonpartisan or partisan basis. In his book entitled The Necessary Revolution in American Education, Francis Keppel, former Assistant Secretary of the U.S. Department of Health, Education, and Welfare, says:

"For a number of years researchers have examined personal characteristics of board members (education, occu-

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Enrollment size and region	Total		Elected boards		Appointed boards	
	Number	Percent	Number	Percent	Number	Percent
Total school systems reporting.....	[1]4,045	100.0	3,473	85.9	572	14.1
DISTRICT ENROLLMENT SIZE GROUP						
I (1,200-2,999).....	2,091	100.0	1,885	90.1	206	9.9
II (3,000-5,999).....	1,111	100.0	925	83.3	186	16.7
III (6,000-11,999).....	522	100.0	414	79.3	108	20.7
IV (12,000-24,999).....	212	100.0	169	79.7	43	20.3
V (25,000 or more).....	109	100.0	80	73.4	29	26.6
REGION						
Northeast.....	885	100.0	829	93.7	56	6.3
North Central.....	1,158	100.0	1,069	92.3	89	7.7
South.....	1,076	100.0	664	61.7	412	38.3
West.....	926	100.0	911	98.4	15	1.6

Distribution of elected and appointed school boards, by district enrollment and region.

[1] Excludes 8 school boards for which this information was not reported and 19 boards with both elected and appointed members. Source: *Local School Boards: Organization and Practices* by Alpheus L. White.

pation, age, income, etc.) in an attempt to see which selection method — election or appointment — attains the most competent members. Insofar as personal characteristics indicate competence, the assertation that one method is superior to the other has not been supported by research. In fact comparisons of elected and appointed board members reveal more similarities than differences."[6]

Advantages and disadvantages can be cited for any method of selecting school board members. Generally, however, school board operation experts and professional educators endorse nonpartisan election as the most desirable method of board selection. Ward G. Reeder pinpoints the views of these school administration authorities when he says:

". . . school-board members should be elected by popular vote at a non-partisan election; by non-partisan is meant that the politics of the candidates should not appear on the ballot or be a consideration in the election campaign. Popular election is recommended, because it permits the people to express themselves directly on school matters and gives the members whom the people select a definite feeling of responsibility to the electorate. Appointment of school-board members by mayors, by councils, by judges, and by similar agencies is here frowned upon because of the danger of domination by a selfish interest, 'political' or otherwise. But these appointive methods sometimes work well, and they always work well when the appointers are intelligent and altruistic."[7]

As summarized by Archie R. Dykes, school board election advocates cite the following advantages of that method:

- Election of board members makes the board more responsive to the public will and creates a degree of intimacy between the people and the board not possible when the board is appointed.
- Public interest in the schools and educational matters is increased when the people have a direct vote in the selection of the school system's governing body.
- Elected school board members have greater independence and freedom to act in the best interests of the school system than do appointed board members.
- An elected board is in a better position to work closely and effectively with its superintendent and professional staff than is an appointed board.

The advantages of board appointment cited by proponents of that procedure are:

- The appointive method provides opportunity for greater selectivity of board members, thus assuring capable board members with proper motives.
- Appointment of board members helps assure harmonious working relationships between the school board and the local governmental body.
- Board stability and continuity of service can be better secured by the appointive method.
- The elective method encourages candidates for board office to develop issues which may have public appeal or to make charges against the incumbent board members and, in some instances, against the professional staff in order to secure votes. Appointive board members generate less community controversy.[8]

In an editorial urging the Illinois Legislature to kill a bill which would replace Chicago's Board of Education with one elected by districts, the Chicago Sun-Times makes some additional points in favor of appointive boards:

"The Mayor has been determined to keep the schools out of politics and has largely succeeded in doing so. The appointments of members are made on the basis of careful selection from among lists submitted by various groups concerned as professionals or as citizens for the welfare of the city's schools. Each board member represents the entire city, rather than a part of it, and on the whole the board's decisions have been made in the interest of the whole rather than a fragment of it.

"An elected board would be fragmented in its interests and concerns, and therefore in its decisions. Factions would be continually at war. Members would be running for re-election rather than objectively considering the problems of the school system. Many likely candidates would refuse to enter an election because of the tremendous effort and expense entailed.[9]

Nonpartisan vs. Partisan

Regarding the nonpartisan or partisan selection of school board members, whether elected or appointed, Edward M. Tuttle typifies the views of many board operation experts. Says Tuttle:

"The narrower the base of candidate selection, whether by individual petitions, official bodies, groups, or organizations, the greater the danger that partisan motives will govern the choices.

"Conversely, when the base of selection is broadened to involve the whole community to the widest possible extent, the best qualified candidates are likely to be nominated."[10]

School board members are elected on a partisan basis in Alabama, Connecticut, Florida, Pennsylvania, Rhode Island and Louisiana; in five other states, some boards are elected on a partisan basis and some on a nonpartisan basis. Except for some large cities where school board members are politically appointed by mayors or other civil officials, most of the remaining states elect the majority of their board members on a nonpartisan basis.

In a bulletin prepared for the Pennsylvania State Board of Education by James W. Brann and published by the Pennsylvania School Boards Association, the author notes that those who advocate the elimination of party labels in board selection generally believe the following benefits would result:

- Citizens who are members of a minority party in a school district would have an opportunity to be elected to the board.
- Personal qualifications of school board candidates would receive the voter's primary consideration, instead of political party membership.
- Capable and community-minded citizens who have no interest in, or who fear partisan politics, would be encouraged to seek school board office.
- The practice of using school board membership as a stepping stone to higher political office would be discouraged.
- The school board member's obligation to a political party would be removed.
- The possibility of unqualified individuals "riding into office" as a candidate with the majority political party would be reduced.
- Since the uncertainties of political change would be largely removed, more efficient and effective long-range public school administration would be assured.
- Nonpartisan selection would be a move toward eliminating graft and favoritism in awards of insurance and supply and construction contracts.[11]

Although most students of school administration favor nonpartisan selection of school board members, some believe that more relationship to political goals may be desirable for the achievement of effective education. For example, Francis Keppel observes:

"On the one hand, school board appointment is supposed to remove or relieve pressures that might be applied against board members if they had to run for office. According to this argument, a more representative body can be obtained if an elected official or body appoints the board. But that course also has its dangers, for the appointing authority can, if he has a free rein, select those who reflect his views. It seems unrealistic to believe the elected appointing officials will always make selections on a nonpartisan basis, or that the removal of political labels will guarantee a nonpartisan election. Appointed members may feel obligated to their appointing agency, while elected members may feel obligated to the group that put them in office. Studies demonstrate what almost anyone would guess —that board members are not always disinterested public servants running for public office to discharge civic duty. Separate elections normally attract only a small number of voters, and it is possible to question whether an elected board is really representative of the community... Both appointed and elected members look to the power clique in their community for advice when important decisions are to be made... And it may in fact be true that more relationships to political goals rather than less would be desirable for the achievement of effective education —if political goals are seen, not in short-range terms such as patronage but in the long view of public policy."[12]

Caucus

One of the greatest weaknesses of the elective system is that the identification and nomination of desirable candidates for board service are left to chance. To overcome the limitations of both selection methods, some communities have established methods of seeking out and encouraging good candidates. The most prevalent of these methods is the caucus and variations of the basic caucus procedure.

A caucus is a body of representatives of a school district chosen for the purpose of canvassing, screening and nominating the best available candidates for school board membership, whether the final selection is to be by appointment or by popular election. Caucus committees fall into four basic types:

1. geographical — members selected by precincts or other geographial subdivisions of the school district;
2. organizational — members named by various existing organizations in the district, organizations which often are nonpolitical and nonsectarian in character;
3. PTA-dominated — sponsored annually by the PTA or similar school-community organizations and/or having a high percentage of its members who are representatives of the PTA or similar school-community organizations;
4. combination organization and geographical — some members chosen on a geographical basis while others are named by organizations.

The underlying principles of the caucus procedure, as cited by Edward M. Tuttle, are:

- The caucus body shall be so broadly representative of the school district as to deserve the confidence and support of the entire community.
- The caucus body shall be completely independent of any other civil, political, or community organization.
- Members of the caucus body, whatever the basis of their selection, shall serve in their individual capacities, dedicated to the best interests of the district as a whole.
- Membership in the caucus body shall be on a rotating basis with a one-third to one-half carryover of old members into each succeeding period of operation.
- The period of service of a particular caucus body shall extend from one school board election (or appointment) through the next, with a sufficient number of meetings to accomplish the following things:
  a) organize the caucus body with a chairman, secretary, committees, etc., as per constitution and bylaws;
  b) carry on a campaign to secure from citizens generally suggestions of qualified candidates for board service;
  c) secure complete data on each potential candidate and go through a process of screening;
  d) interview and secure consent from candidates finally chosen by the caucus;
  e) present the names of candidates to the proper appointment or election authorities;
  f) publicize the caucus selections to the district with supporting data, and urge widespread and active community backing for the candidates;
  g) arrange for the proper selection of new members of the caucus body for the next period, and for their adequate orientation.[13]

Variations of the caucus procedure are methods called nomination by petition and the intelligent selection system. Both systems are organized methods of using the leaders of education, civic and service groups within the school district to act as a nominating committee for members to the board of education. In the nomination by petition method, community groups often circulate the school board candidate's petition and do other campaigning for him.

A proposal developed by the education committee of the Greater San Francisco Chamber of Commerce illustrates the details involved in establishing a school board caucus or nominating committee. To produce more orderly procedures of selecting board candidates in San Francisco, the Chamber of Commerce committee has suggested that a citizen's nominating committee be established to screen and select those candidates. The candidates' names would be submitted to the mayor, who would then make his selections and present them to the voters for confirmation or rejection.

At the present time, according to the Chamber, school board candidates in San Francisco are selected in a "haphazard way," with the mayor soliciting recommendations from some organizations and individuals and they also petitioning him regarding their choice of candidates. The primary consideration in forming a nominating committee would be to alleviate this "no-method" approach by assisting the mayor in screening potential board members and submitting to the mayor a list of persons who would be qualified to serve on the school board.

The duties of the nominating committee would be to open the selection process by soliciting recommendations from individuals, groups and organizations from which an availability list can be prepared for the screening process. After the preliminary screening has been completed, a qualified list of nominees is to be presented to the mayor for appointment and presentation to the voters.

The composition of the nominating committee would be thirteen members, appointed by the mayor, who are the senior officers of ten prominent city-wide organizations and institutions representative of the various educational, business, labor, religious and other groups in San Francisco. Three members of the committee would be appointed by the mayor from the citizenry at large. The committee then has the power to elect its own officers and adopt rules of procedure.[14]

Conclusion

School boards throughout the nation are selected in a variety of ways, with election by popular vote being the most predominant method. But as America becomes more urbanized and neighborhood ties weaken, the shift may be away from elected and toward appointed boards. Recognizing the wide diversity in local school board selection procedures, previous policymaking bodies of the National School Boards Association have developed the following statement:

"School boards should function in a non-partisan, broadly representative, team-spirited manner. Every member of a school board should represent open-mindedly the entire school district, and, in consequence, must let his consideration for the entire district take precedence over every form of partisanship and special interest —political, racial, religious, geographic, economic, social, civic, or other."

Debates regarding the relative merits of various methods of selecting school board members will continue and perhaps intensify as new patterns of lay control of education emerge. Because of the vital influence of public interest on any method of selection, there may never be any conclusive evidence in favor of a particular method. The success of any board selection procedure will always be determined by the intelligence, sincerity, educational desires and active concern of those who do the selecting, whether this be the people in an election or a governmental authority by appointment.

[1] Alpheus L. White, *Local School Boards: Organization and Practices* (Washington, 1962), p. 8.

[2] *Local School Boards: Size and Selection,* Educational Research Service, National Education Association, Circular No. 2 (Washington, 1964), p. 4.

[3] Edward M. Tuttle, *School Board Leadership in America,* Revised Edition (Danville, Ill., 1963), p. 151.

[4] White, p. 8.

[5] *Local School Boards: Size and Selection,* p. 4.

[6] Francis Keppel, *The Necessary Revolution in American Education* (New York, 1966), p. 146.

[7] Ward G. Reeder, *Fundamentals of Public School Administration,* Fourth Edition (New York, 1958), p. 65.

[8] Archie R. Dykes, *School Board and Superintendent: Their Effective Working Relationships* (Danville, Ill., 1965), pp. 173-176.

[9] Chicago *Sun-Times,* June 12, 1967, Editorial Page.

[10] Tuttle, p. 152.

[11] *The Election of School Directors — Partisan, Nonpartisan or Bipartisan,* Pennsylvania School Boards Association Information Service, Vol. IV, No. 28 (Harrisburg, 1966), pp. 9-10.

[12] Keppel, pp. 146-147.

[13] Tuttle, pp. 152-153.

[14] *A Proposal for the Establishment of a School Board Nomination Committee,* Education Committee, Greater San Francisco Chamber of Commerce (San Francisco, 1967).

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